



SATIRE AND BIAS IN POLITICAL ALLEGORY: ANALYZING ORWELL AND STEINBECK

Nathan Siu

Research Scholars Program, Harvard Student Agencies, In collaboration with Learn with Leaders

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the reliability of political allegories in literature, focusing on George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The study analyzes how allegories can introduce bias and inaccuracies, leading to misinterpretations of real-world political situations. By employing satire, authors exaggerate certain aspects, which can skew readers' perceptions and foster prejudice. The paper highlights the importance of understanding these literary devices and the need for readers to conduct their own research to gain a complete and truthful understanding of the topics discussed. The analysis underscores the dual nature of political allegories as both insightful critiques and potential sources of misinformation.

KEYWORDS: Political Allegory, Satire, Bias in Literature, George Orwell, John Steinbeck, American Dream.

INTRODUCTION

Allegory uses fictional characters and plots to suggest deeper meanings, often related to real-life events. This literary device is frequently employed by political authors like George Orwell and Charles Dickens to depict political scenarios, leading to the genre of political allegory. These works generally reflect the author's perspectives, introducing bias and potential inaccuracies. Allegory can exaggerate aspects, causing readers to form biased opinions or take unethical actions. While presenting a seemingly truthful surface, these texts often contain misleading details that distort the reader's understanding of the situation.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative, secondary methodology. The qualitative nature focuses on interpretative analysis, seeking to understand the deeper meanings and implications of political allegories. The study does not rely on numerical data or statistical analysis but instead examines themes and symbolism within the literary works. The secondary nature of the research involves analyzing existing literary works, specifically George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. These texts serve as the primary sources of information, with no primary data collection such as surveys or interviews.

A limitation of this methodology is that it relies heavily on the subjective interpretation of existing texts, which may introduce researcher bias. Additionally, without primary data, the study lacks firsthand perspectives that could provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of political allegories.

LITERARY ANALYSIS AND SATIRE

For basic knowledge to understand this topic, and before the evidence is shown, the way authors engrave their message into a book must be understood. Books will be discussed later, with real-time evidence the authors hid in their works. These include

Animal Farm (Orwell, 1999, released in 1945), a Russian Revolution allegory and classic by George Orwell, and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937), another masterpiece discussing the American Dream by John Steinbeck.

These primary sources serve as the basis of the research, providing a platform to find crucial and undeniable evidence. First, however, the science of political allegory and the persuasion techniques within it are crucial to finding patterns within the texts so that a set conclusion can be determined as to what extent these political allegory masterpieces are misleading. First, these allegories usually use another literary device known as satire. "Satire is the art of making someone or something look ridiculous, raising laughter in order to embarrass, humble, or discredit its target" (Gottlieb, 2023). This is an indirect yet persuasive technique used in most political allegories. The reason this technique works is because of emotions stirred within the human being: satire arouses our negative emotions or anger towards the targeted subject, causing poor impressions of the governmental systems, parties, or decisions (Chen, Gan, and Sun, 2017).

This pattern of satire used in political allegories is key to finding out to what extent they affect the reader's view. A study from the University of Arkansas shows that a student's in-class media, meaning books and written responses, are just over 4 times as effective with satire when bringing out political topics, meaning a huge increase in student political efficacy. This means higher chances of protest, engagement in politically related affairs, and ultimately a greater understanding of each government's dark flaws (Glazier, 2014). As previously mentioned, satire is an exaggeration and is therefore a purposeful inaccuracy that is meant to trigger a reaction of justice, no matter whether rightful or prejudiced.

There are more examples explaining the concept of satire

and how it affects a reader's point of view. According to a quote cited by Burgers & Brugman's (2021) work, satire as a persuasion method was enough for the 1990s movement in Serbia to develop in great numbers and overthrow the regime at that time. Another example from *Brave New World*, written by Aldous Huxley, used satire in his dystopia where Americans take over the world (Lebeouf, 2007). It managed to create a sense of fear in readers of that time and therefore started a controversy as to whether this new reality would be true to any extent. Now that the power of satire and its role in creating purposeful inaccuracies to encourage the action of prejudice is discussed, it is time to explore the books.

DISCUSSION

Animal Farm

The first one to look at is *Animal Farm*, written by George Orwell. This political allegory discusses a truth: when power reaches a person's hands, they can easily become corrupt. The tale begins with Jones, the farm owner, mistreating his animals by not caring for them and giving them meager food. However, under old Major's revolutionary speech, the animals chase Jones away, and two pigs take control: Napoleon and Snowball. At first, they live in harmony without human interference and work peacefully. Slowly, Napoleon becomes greedy, and corrupt, and eventually takes full control of the farm, resembling Jones' reign. Most of Orwell's characters are allegories of real-world politicians and leaders. Napoleon represents Joseph Stalin, Snowball represents Leon Trotsky, and the animals are the citizens under Russia's dictatorship. While most of the story is true, parts of the *Beast Fable* use satire and depict characters unrealistically. For instance, Snowball is shown as caring about the animals' opinions and aiming for peace with minimal human interference (p24, 36). Orwell exaggerates Snowball's benevolence to highlight his good nature. However, Trotsky, the founder of the Red Army, eliminated those who did not support the revolution, which contrasts with Snowball's portrayal (Yegorov, 2016). Trotsky also attempted to overthrow Stalin through the United Opposition, something Snowball never did. Another example is the satirical ending of *Animal Farm*, where it says, "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again: but already it was impossible to say which was which" (pg. 102). This is not entirely accurate since Stalin maintained a federalist structure and a core structure of self-government, unlike Lenin. These inaccuracies can significantly change readers' perspectives. Readers might view Snowball as a hero ready to save his animals and mistakenly apply this to Trotsky, ignoring that Russia remained a dictatorship. Although Napoleon is similarly corrupt, Orwell fails to acknowledge the prosperity Napoleon's dictatorship brought compared to Jones' neglect. This illustrates how political allegories can be purposefully inaccurate to convey messages and may lead to misinterpretations and judgments.

Of Mice and Men

The other example, as mentioned, is Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. This tale is about two poor men, George and Lennie, with contrasting personalities, trying to achieve a dream of their own land where they could finally escape poverty. George is just an

average man, trying to look for a job amid the Great Depression. He understands what needs to be done to attempt to achieve his goal of escaping poverty and drags Lennie along with him. Lennie Small is brawny but has intellectual deficiencies. They manage to find a job on a ranch. However, one day, Lennie strokes Curley's wife's hair and accidentally breaks her neck. George has to kill Lennie for the sake of his own future after that.

Just like in *Animal Farm*, each character represents a group or an idea during those times. George is an allegory for the many workers, immigrants or not, going to America to pursue the American Dream—a promise that if one worked hard enough, they would own land. Lennie represents the illusion of the American Dream, something to blame for all the failures stopping the dream from happening (Diaz, 2022). This situation was prevalent during the Great Depression. Faced with poverty, many citizens were forced to move to the United States (represented by the farm) and work in hopes of a comfortable life, which they never achieved. However, like in *Animal Farm*, the characters are overly satirical and affect a reader's view of the allegory in relation to the real thing. Lennie's name is Lennie Small, although he is a bulky man. Therefore, the word 'small' can be referenced in a few different ways. It could represent the insignificance of the working class during the Great Depression and Lennie's small IQ. Collating this information can help us conclude that those who are not cunning enough and just sit there waiting for orders never get what they want. However, this is a very misleading comment. Readers of this satire would have cynical thoughts, such as looking down on weaker people in terms of money and intelligence to succeed more in life.

Another example is the killing of Lennie at the end. While giving the same effect as Lennie's surname, it takes things deeper, telling the reader that one would die if one weren't strong enough. Both messages would be true in Steinbeck's time. However, in this age, the weak not surviving only stays true to an extent, but with a stronger economic system nowadays, impoverished people can find support and have a comfortable life. This is an example of a political allegory not being valid anymore, yet still bringing out messages that could harm the reader's mind through prejudice.

Interpretation

Synthesizing the insights gleaned from *Animal Farm* and *Of Mice and Men*, it becomes evident that political allegories serve as a double-edged sword. While they offer profound critiques of societal issues and political regimes, their inherent biases and exaggerations can skew perceptions and propagate partial truths. Orwell's portrayal of a dystopian farm mirrors the pitfalls of authoritarianism but may oversimplify complex political dynamics. Steinbeck's depiction of the American dream, colligated with harsh realities, invites empathy but can also paint an incomplete picture of socio-economic challenges. Ultimately, these allegories are mirrors reflecting the authors' perspectives, compelling yet not entirely reliable as sole sources of political understanding.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, political allegories can significantly mislead readers, fostering prejudice or prompting certain actions. They achieve this in two ways: by intentionally omitting details to highlight the severity of a situation and emphasize a strong viewpoint (as seen in *Animal Farm*), or by using accurate language that becomes outdated, causing the intended messages to be misconstrued. While political allegories can provide an accessible understanding of complex topics, it is crucial for readers to conduct their own research to ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the subject.

REFERENCES

1. Burgers, C., & Brugman, B. C. (2021). How satirical news impacts affective responses, learning, and persuasion: A Three-Level Random-Effects Meta-Analysis. *Communication Research*, 49(7), 966–993. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502211032100>
2. Chen, H., Gan, C., & Sun, P. (2017). How does political satire influence political participation? Examining the role of counter-and. ResearchGate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318816733_How_Does_Political_Satire_Influence_Political_Participation_Examining_the_Role_of_Counter-and_Proattitudinal_Exposure_Anger_and_Personal_Issue_Importance
3. Diaz, N. (2022b, January 5). The Politics of John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men": a critique of 'The American Dream'. Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/@nicholasdiaz7/the-politics-of-john-steinbecks-of-mice-and-men-a-critique-of-the-american-dream-d423e0aa8070>
4. Glazier, R. (2014). Satire and Efficacy in the Political Science Classroom, JSTOR. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/a4f71e8b-5e73-3dce-9cd5-b75b113833a6?searchText=how+to+use+satire&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dhow%2Bto%2Buse%2Bsatire&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A5fd4e563dc276285395280ea0caf19c4&seq=3
5. LeBoeuf, M. (2021, May). The Power of Ridicule: An Analysis of Satire. Available at: The Power of Ridicule: An Analysis of Satire (uri.edu)
6. Orwell, G. (1999). *Animal Farm : A Fairy Story*. Available at: http://americkaliteratura.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/2/0/13209488/george_orwell_animal_farm.pdf
7. Steinbeck, J. (1937). *Of Mice and Men*.
8. Gottlieb, E. (2023, June 26). What is Satire? || Definition & Examples. College of Liberal Arts. Available at: <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-satire>
9. Yegorov, O., & Rbth. (2023). Leon Trotsky: 6 facts about the disgraced Russian revolutionary. Russia Beyond. Available at: https://www.rbth.com/arts/2016/11/07/leon-trotsky-6-facts-about-the-disgraced-russian-revolutionary_645523